

House Resolution

No. 19

Introduced by Assembly Member Bass

July 3, 2007

House Resolution No. 19—Relative to the Honorable Augustus Freeman (Gus) Hawkins.

1 WHEREAS, The Honorable Augustus Freeman (Gus) Hawkins
2 was a soft spoken, articulate man whose public service as a
3 Member of the Assembly and as a United States Representative
4 from Congress spanned the years from 1935 to 1991, making him
5 the longest serving Member of the Assembly, 28 years, and the
6 first African American to serve in Congress from this state; and
7 WHEREAS, In the Assembly and as the first African American
8 United State's Representative in Congress from the western part
9 of the country, Augustus Hawkins was elected from districts
10 populated by African Americans, Asian Americans, Mexican
11 Americans, and white Americans, and he devoted his energy to
12 issues of civil rights, employment, education, child care, housing,
13 slum clearance, and age discrimination; and
14 WHEREAS, Augustus Hawkins was the son of Nyanza
15 Hawkins, a pharmacist, and Hattie Freemam Hawkins, and was
16 born in Shreveport, Louisiana, on August 31, 1907; Augustus, the
17 youngest of five children, was 10 when his father sold his business
18 and moved the family to Los Angeles; he worked in a drug store
19 and in the post office during his high school years, and as a janitor
20 in the girls' gymnasium when he studied at the University of
21 California at Los Angeles (UCLA) for a B.A. degree in economics
22 which he earned in 1931; and

1 WHEREAS, Mr. Hawkins' original intention was to enter
2 graduate school at UCLA to prepare for a career in civil
3 engineering, but the lack of sufficient financial support made it
4 more attractive to take classes in the Institute of Government of
5 the University of Southern California while he worked in the real
6 estate business he established with his brother, Edward; before
7 long, his increasing interest in the plight of minorities in his area
8 led to political ventures in support of Upton Sinclair's unsuccessful
9 campaign for governor of California and Franklin Delano
10 Roosevelt's candidacy that ended with election to his first term as
11 President of the United States in 1932; and

12 WHEREAS, In 1935, Mr. Hawkins won a seat in the Assembly
13 by defeating another African American, Frederick Roberts, a
14 longtime Assembly Member; Hawkins's tenure stretched into more
15 than a quarter of a century—from 1935 to 1962—and he served
16 an identical longevity in the United States House of
17 Representatives; and

18 WHEREAS, As an Assembly Member, Mr. Hawkins chaired
19 the powerful Assembly Rules Committee and was an influential
20 figure in Sacramento, sponsoring laws that reflected his concern
21 about the status of the ethnic minorities in his district and working
22 people in the state; although he initiated or coauthored more than
23 100 other laws, he is best remembered in the state for the five years
24 of struggle leading to the passage of the California Fair
25 Employment Practices Act, signed in 1959; Mr. Hawkins used his
26 willingness to work hard and his innate capabilities to chair
27 powerful Assembly committees that dealt with unemployment,
28 labor and capital, rules, and public utilities; and

29 WHEREAS, Mr. Hawkins, with Speaker of the Assembly, Jesse
30 Unruh, was responsible for upgrading both the services for and
31 the role of Members of the Assembly in his capacity as chair of
32 the Assembly Committee on Rules; and

33 WHEREAS, When Mr. Hawkins went from the Assembly to
34 the House of Representatives in 1963, he was the spokesman for
35 the same constituency he had in the state government of California,
36 and brought to Washington, D.C. his valuable legislative
37 experience; Mr. Hawkins hoped that he could bring about more
38 meaningful, more widespread changes at the federal level than in
39 the state house; in April of 1970, Mr. Hawkins was cosponsor of
40 the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, which

1 improved the quality of education for children from lower income
2 families and in his early years in the House of Representatives, he
3 helped to establish the Equal Employment Opportunity
4 Commission in Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964; and

5 WHEREAS, When Mr. Hawkins chaired the powerful House
6 Education and Labor Committee, his charge was to monitor
7 existing programs and provide legislation and funding for their
8 operation at a time of severe budget cuts proposed by the Reagan
9 administration; he opposed President Reagan's cuts in social
10 programs, such as financial aid to students, grants to educational
11 institutions, unemployment insurance, funds for school lunches,
12 and job training; Mr. Hawkins also chaired the Committee on
13 House Administration during the 97th and 98th Congresses and
14 his greatest success in Congress was the passage of the Full
15 Employment and Balanced Growth Act of 1978, also known as
16 the Humphrey-Hawkins Act; and

17 WHEREAS, Mr. Hawkins also succeeded in restoring an
18 honorable discharge for the entire 1st Battalion of the Twenty-fifth
19 Infantry Regiment of the United States Army, 167 African
20 American soldiers in all, after they were falsely accused of a public
21 disturbance in Brownsville, Texas in 1906, and throughout his
22 years in Congress, Mr. Hawkins pointed to failures in federal
23 action; he emphasized that unemployment, lack of adequate
24 education, and the sense of isolation among financially distressed
25 people were the chief causes of disruptive behavior that affects
26 the population as a whole; over and over he pleaded for tax reform
27 and encouraged citizens to be involved in the workings of their
28 government at the grassroots level; and

29 WHEREAS, Mr. Hawkins openly voiced dissatisfaction with
30 military spending coupled with continued mistreatment of African
31 American veterans returning from Vietnam; a survey he requested
32 confirmed that of 523 higher-level positions in the Pentagon, only
33 three were held by African Americans, and not one was involved
34 in decisionmaking; during the war in Vietnam, Mr. Hawkins and
35 William R. Anderson, the Representative from Tennessee, by their
36 protest to President Richard M. Nixon, caused an immediate
37 correction of the inhumane treatment of civilians in a prison in
38 South Vietnam; and

39 WHEREAS, When Congressman Hawkins announced his plans
40 to retire in January of 1991, he did so anticipating passage of the

1 civil rights legislation that was ultimately signed on November 21
2 of that year; this was a fitting reward for a man whose sole purpose
3 in public life was to better conditions for people without the means
4 or the knowledge to take action for themselves; in retirement, he
5 lives in Washington, D.C., engaged in tasks that mirror his tenure
6 as an elected official; and

7 WHEREAS, With characteristic energy, Mr. Hawkins now
8 spends more time as director of the Hawkins Family Memorial
9 Foundation for Educational Research and Development which he
10 founded in 1969, and supported by Members of Congress and
11 educational institutions, the foundation formulates and implements
12 policies aimed at more effective education of young people in
13 preparation for employment; this employment increases the chances
14 for young adults to be more productive and free from the problems
15 that beset large numbers of minority populations; and

16 WHEREAS, Augustus Freeman (Gus) Hawkins is no longer
17 bound to the demanding and often unpredictable schedules in state
18 and federal government, he maintains an active membership in the
19 NAACP and the Masonic Lodge; the widespread esteem felt for
20 the former United States Representative is shown by the honorary
21 doctorates that have been conferred upon him by 12 universities
22 in states all over the country; now, therefore, be it

23 *Resolved by the Assembly of the State of California*, That the
24 Assembly commends and recognizes the Honorable Augustus
25 Freeman (Gus) Hawkins in this, his 100th year of life, for his great
26 accomplishments to this state and our country as both a former
27 Member of this Assembly and as a United States Representative
28 in the Congress; and be it further

29 *Resolved*, That the Chief Clerk of the Assembly transmit copies
30 of this resolution to the Honorable Augustus Freeman (Gus)
31 Hawkins and to the author for appropriate distribution.

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